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POWDERY MILDEW OF CRAPE MYRTLE

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Crape myrtle, Lagerstroemia indica L., is a deciduous shrub native to China. It attains a height of 10 to 20 feet and is widely grown in the south for its showy white, pink, red, or lavender flowers. One often sees it lining the drives of old homesteads (1).

The powdery mildew disease of crape myrtle has been known since 1924, when it was reported from Texas by Taubenhaus (3); it has since been reported from most of the southeastern states including South Carolina and the District of Columbia (4). Its presence in Florida was established in 1925 by G. F. Weber, who observed it in areas of Gainesville.

Powdery mildew of crape myrtle is caused by the fungus Erysiphe lagerstroemiae West. This fungus is a member of the powdery mildew groups which has airborne spores, is largely superficial on plants, shade-loving and tolerant to rather wide temperature ranges and dry conditions (5). Lacking the perfect stage, the fungus probably overwinters in the bud scales of the plant (4). With the onset of succulent plant growth in the early spring the fungus is able to resume growth. Great numbers of spores are produced on the new shoots in a relatively short period of time. These spores are easily disseminated by the wind to adjacent leaves and plants.

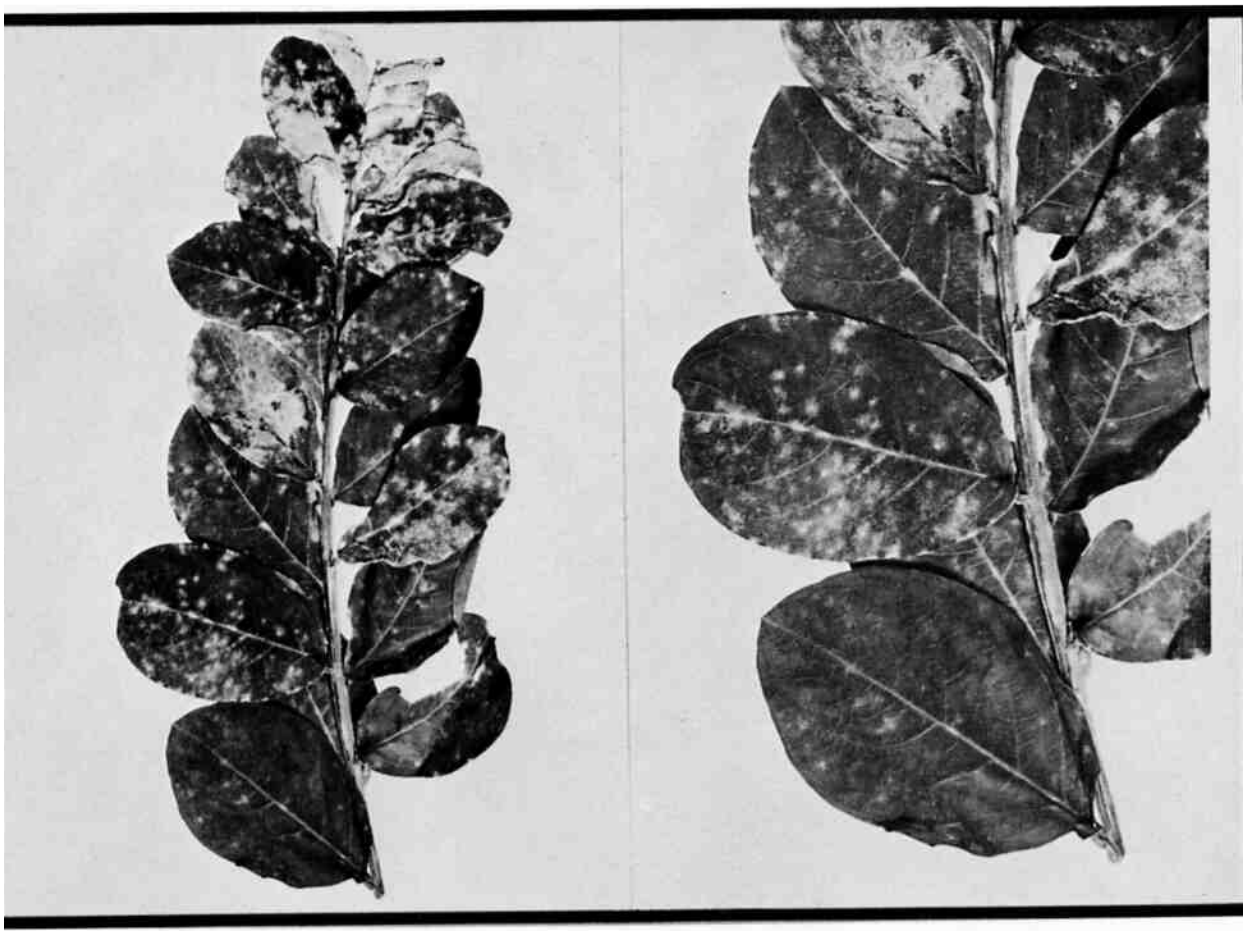

Fig. 1. Powdery mildew of crape myrtle.

SYMPTOMS. The first conspicuous symptom of the disease is the presence of the fungus itself which appears as small, powdery or mealy white patches on the leaves (Fig. 1). The white spots increase in size so that sometimes entire leaves are covered with the fungus. Infected leaves are reduced in size, abnormally thickened and malformed. Under favorable conditions the whole plant could become infected in 7 to 10 days. As warmer temperatures become manifest as in midsummer, the disease tends to subside and even disappear but may reappear in the fall (4).

CONTROL. Acti-dione PM is effective in controlling powdery mildew of crape myrtle (2). Parnon, a relatively new fungicide, is also reported to offer very good control of powdery mildew on roses and other ornamentals at the rate of 1/4 to 1/2 pint per 100 gallons of water every 7 to 14 days.

Literature Cited

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